



Certification Report

City of Battle Creek

March 2018

MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

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Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) is a certification program supporting community revitalization and the attraction and retention of businesses, entrepreneurs and talent throughout Michigan. RRC promotes communities to be development ready and competitive in today's economy by actively engaging stakeholders and proactively planning for the future—making them more attractive for projects that create places where people want to live, work and invest.

In September 2015, Battle Creek received a report of findings after being evaluated under the statewide RRC program. The report identified several areas the city needed to address prior to receiving RRC certification. Communities must demonstrate that all best practice evaluation criteria have been met to be awarded RRC certification.

Battle Creek is committed to the RRC best practices and has taken the necessary steps to ensure the city's long term competitiveness. The city commission and planning commission have worked diligently to bring their policies, procedures and plans up to date and in line with RRC best practice criteria. Battle Creek is a forward-thinking community that has laid the groundwork for significant redevelopment and renewal. The 2018 Battle Creek master plan and downtown plan were developed utilizing creative public engagement techniques designed

to give all residents the opportunity to participate. The zoning ordinance was updated to encourage a walkable, pedestrian-friendly downtown environment. A strategy that documents the many entities involved in marketing the Battle Creek area was developed; this encourages coordination amongst those entities and ensures all target audiences are being reached. Finally, the city is committed to implementation of the BC Vision, an economic development strategy developed by local foundations in collaboration with community partner organizations and through significant public engagement.

The city should be proud of the hard work, achievements and transformations that have taken place. City of Battle Creek has positioned itself to strengthen local quality of life in difficult economic times. Achieving RRC certification is a statement to the private sector that the city has a vision for the future and the development process is streamlined, predictable and user-friendly. It is important to acknowledge that the work does not end here. Moving forward, Battle Creek should build upon its successes by continuing to engage the public, strategically updating the master plan and capital improvements plan, proactively marketing prime redevelopment opportunities and implementing economic development and marketing strategies. RRC certification is effective for three years, provided the certification requirements are maintained throughout that time period.




Methodology

The basic assessment tool for evaluation is the RRC Best Practices. These six standards were developed in conjunction with public and private sector experts and address key elements of community and economic development. A community must demonstrate all of the RRC Best Practice components have been met to become RRC certified. Once received, certification is valid for three years.

Measurement of a community to the best practices is completed through the RRC team’s research, observation and interviews, as well as the consulting advice and technical expertise of the RRC Advisory Council. The team analyzes a community’s development materials, including, but not limited to: the master plan;

redevelopment strategy; capital improvements plan; budget; public participation plan; zoning regulations; development procedures; applications; economic development strategy; marketing strategies; and website. Researchers observe the meetings of the community’s governing body, planning commission, zoning board of appeals and other committees as applicable. In confidential interviews, the team also records the input of local business owners and developers who have worked with the community.

A community’s degree of attainment for each best practice criteria is visually represented in this report by the following:

	Green indicates the best practice component is currently being met by the community.
	Yellow indicates some of the best practice component may be in place, but additional action is required.
	Red indicates the best practice component is not present or outdated.

This report represents the final findings of the evaluation of City of Battle Creek’s redevelopment processes and practices. All questions should be directed to the RRC team at RRC@michigan.org.

Best Practice 1.1—The plans

Best Practice 1.1 evaluates community planning and how the redevelopment vision is embedded in the master plan, capital improvements plan, downtown plan and corridor plan. To comply with the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, Public Act 33 of 2008 and meet Best Practice 1.1 criteria, communities must maintain an updated master plan. Since receiving the RRC Report of Findings, the city underwent a complete rewrite of its master plan, including a downtown plan. The plan provides thorough background of existing community conditions, Battle Creek's location in the region, community history, past plans and studies to be referenced, demographics, existing land use, current zoning, and background of other entities engaged in land use planning activities. RRC provided technical assistance to analyze the economic and fiscal projections for the city depending on where development takes place; i.e., infill redevelopment in the core versus new development in highway oriented suburban sites that may not yet have adequate infrastructure. The analysis helped shape the master plan, with the first plan goal being a focus on the city core, including the need to focus infill within the urban growth boundary. Related master plan goals include repositioning land use to reflect the anticipated needs of the community, promoting reinvestment in neighborhoods, revitalizing commercial corridors, elevating downtown as an energetic community focal point and center of government and commerce, activating the riverfront, promoting community appearance and pride, fostering an educated workforce, an efficient and well-maintained transportation network including pedestrian and bike network, and accessible trails and recreation opportunities. The future land use map provides detailed explanation of each land use type including the attributes of the land use activity, its urban form, and connectivity of the type. A corridor framework plan for the Columbia Avenue Corridor is also included; this corridor is centrally located within the community, acts as a key transportation connector, is located near Goguac Lake, and is a key route through Battle Creek and near downtown. Key natural and green infrastructure areas are identified, including areas throughout the city that can help create a broad green infrastructure

network, and specific methods for encouraging better on-site storm water management. Short-, mid- and long-term actions are identified, including potential partnerships and potential funding sources. The plan culminates with the identification of catalyst projects and redevelopment sites, and specific recommendations for future zoning ordinance updates to better align with the master plan. The plan is available on the city website, and annual updates on master plan progress should be made to the city commission, allowing for adjustment where necessary and acknowledgement of accomplishments.

A plan for Battle Creek's downtown was developed alongside the master plan, and defines a direction for future development and redevelopment of the downtown area of the city. Downtown boundaries generally the area bounded by Washington Street, Champion Street, Penn Street, Elm Street, Dickman Street, and Grove Street. Downtown plan goals align with those of the master plan, with a focus on housing, mixed-use development, minimizing storm water runoff, infill development that encourages sidewalk activity, pedestrian and bicycle amenities, connections between key places, and a walkable downtown for everyone. Improving public perception of downtown has been a major need in the community; that effort begins in this plan with documentation of downtown assets, opportunities and past accomplishments. Three catalytic sites are identified that could transform the downtown and demonstrate urban living and mixed-use as a positive reuse, including the Van Buren Street Lot, Jackson Street Lot, Southern Gateway Riverfront, and steps to consider in refreshing current downtown marketing and branding efforts. Goals, prioritized actions, and responsible parties are identified in the implementation chapter; further project details regarding cost are provided in the city's capital improvement program and tax increment financing plan.

A comprehensive capital improvements plan (CIP) is an essential tool for the planning and development of the social, physical and economic wellbeing of a community and is a tool to implement the vision outlined in the master plan. Battle Creek has a six-year CIP that is reviewed and updated as part of the annual budget, and is available online.

Best practice findings

Best Practice 1.1—The plans *continued*

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has adopted a master plan in the past five years.	✓
		The governing body has adopted a downtown plan.	✓
		The governing body has adopted a corridor plan.	N/A
		The governing body has adopted a capital improvements plan.	✓

Best Practice 1.2—Public participation

Best Practice 1.2 assesses how well the community identifies and engages its stakeholders on a continual basis. City of Battle Creek has demonstrated that public participation efforts utilize both basic and proactive methods. Input for City of Battle Creek’s master plan was provided from a variety of stakeholders using methods such as a city-commissioned survey to assess the livability of Battle Creek, outreach to generate the BC vision, workshops, a project website, online surveys, hosted community conversations, neighborhood workshops, personal interviews and an open house. To gather input for the downtown plan, a series of interviews were conducted with local business owners, residents and community members, along with a one-day design workshop, a walking tour of downtown and a series of interactive sessions. These efforts were formalized into a community engagement plan which provides

community engagement plan goals and objectives, related state and local regulations, key stakeholders in Battle Creek, ways citizens can formally participate in city decisions by serving on a development review body, methods of community participation, how results will be communicated, and tools to assist staff in determining the level and type of community participation for a specific project. Guidance tools provided include a public involvement tools chart by category, and a public participation spectrum from inform to decide.

The plan serves as the city’s best practices for input and recognizes that public input throughout planning and policy development is crucial to building consensus and buy-in from community stakeholders. The plan will be reviewed and updated on a routine basis in conjunction with the city’s master plan.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has a public participation plan for engaging a diverse set of community stakeholders.	✓
		The community demonstrates that public participation efforts go beyond the basic methods.	✓
		The community shares outcomes of all public participation processes.	✓

Best practice findings

Best Practice 2.1—Zoning regulations

Best Practice 2.1 evaluates the community’s zoning ordinance to determine how well it regulates for and implements the goals of the master plan. The city’s zoning ordinance and map are available on the city website, allowing developers and the public access 24/7. Battle Creek’s zoning ordinance required minor but important changes for shaping an inviting, walkable community and providing flexibility where necessary to encourage desired development. Enhanced landscaping standards were incorporated to encourage sites that are visually attractive and have distinct character. Revised standards provide for preservation of existing trees, requirement of parking lot landscaping and trees, a prohibition against invasive species, and a Michigan Natural Features Inventory reference list. Landscaping standards also accomplish goals related to green infrastructure and community appearance and pride. Additional changes

were made to the parking regulations of the ordinance that provide an updated uses chart, minimum and maximum amounts, options to reduce the number of required spaces, shared parking options and provision of bicycle parking in lieu of some required parking spaces. To improve the user-friendliness of the ordinance, a summary sheet of permitted uses for each zoning district was developed, along with a one-pager that provides a zoning district key and instructions on viewing zoning maps online. While Battle Creek’s current zoning ordinance meets the RRC best practices, the regulations must continue to be reviewed against newly adopted plans to ensure they are helping the city move toward accomplishment of master plan, downtown plan and other goals. This helps ensure that Battle Creek’s adopted code will continue to implement the mixed-use, diverse, urban environment that the community desires.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has adopted a zoning ordinance that aligns with the goals of the current master plan.	✓
		The zoning ordinance provides for areas of concentrated development in appropriate locations and encourages the type and form of development desired.	✓
		The zoning ordinance contains flexible zoning tools to encourage development and redevelopment.	✓
		The zoning ordinance allows for a variety of housing options.	✓
		The zoning ordinance includes standards to improve non-motorized transportation.	✓
		The zoning ordinance includes flexible parking requirements.	✓
		The zoning ordinance includes standards for green infrastructure.	✓
		The zoning ordinance is user-friendly.	✓

Best Practice 3.1—Site plan review policy and procedures

Best Practice 3.1 evaluates the city's site plan review policies, project tracking and availability of development information. Battle Creek's process for site plan review is clearly documented in the zoning ordinance. Site plan applications are available at the planning department, filed with the inspections department, reviewed by the joint site plan review team, given final approval by the zoning administrator, and then appeals made to the Zoning Board of Appeals. The planning department is charged with assisting applicants throughout the development review process; to encourage early discussion of projects and clear conveying of city ordinances, goals, and timelines, the opportunity for conceptual site plan review has been incorporated into the site plan review application, and a flowchart of the site plan review process is provided alongside the site plan review application. The city practice of encouraging developers to seek input through neighborhood planning councils was incorporated into the public participation strategy. Formalizing this practice encourages two-way communication and collaborative problem solving by minimizing disputes and resolving

issues before they become an obstacle.

The city utilizes BS&A software to manage projects throughout the development process. Tracking projects allows for increased transparency and efficiency, keeps staff well-informed, provides clarification as to the status of a project, and can assist in measuring the results of the approval process. Project tracking, along with results of the site plan and permitting and inspections customer feedback survey, can provide guidance to the joint site plan review team of lessons learned, successes, and areas of the review process in need of improvement. Excellent customer service is key to a redevelopment-friendly process as developers and business owners look to invest in communities where they can expect decisions and communications in a fair and timely manner. Creating an environment of continuous review and improvement and maintaining streamlined, well-documented development review policies and procedures ensures a smooth and predictable experience during the city's development review process; this is key to enticing investment to a community.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The zoning ordinance articulates a thorough site plan review process.	✓
		The community has a qualified intake professional.	✓
		The community defines and offers conceptual site plan review meetings for applicants.	✓
		The community encourages a developer to seek input from neighboring residents and businesses at the onset of the application process.	✓
		The appropriate departments engage in joint site plan reviews.	✓
		The community has a clearly documented internal staff review policy.	✓
		The community promptly acts on development requests.	✓
		The community has a method to track development projects.	✓
		The community annually reviews the successes and challenges with the site plan review procedures.	✓

Best practice findings

Best Practice 3.2—Guide to Development

Best Practice 3.2 evaluates the availability of the community’s development information. Land use planning and development is a process that involves a wide range of stakeholders. For the process to work effectively, everyone involved must understand their role and responsibilities. Most of the guide to development items were available on the Battle Creek website at the

time of evaluation; items added since that time include the site plan review flowchart and a link to the fee schedule alongside the development review information. The city has updated its policies to allow for payment by credit card, providing customers with a convenient method to pay development fees.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community maintains an online guide to development that explains policies, procedures and steps to obtain approvals.	✓
		The community annually reviews the fee schedule.	✓

Best Practice 4.1—Recruitment and orientation

Best Practice 4.1 evaluates how a community conducts recruitment and orientation for newly appointed or elected officials and board members. Battle Creek’s application for open board and commission seats is available on the city website; the authorizing legislation, purpose, current membership and any special requirement of each are listed and described on the boards, committees and councils webpage. Once appointed, city board and commission members receive orientation materials when appointed or

elected. Orientation for new planning commissioners is comprehensive and appointees receive copies of the zoning ordinance and map, master plan, board contact list, meeting schedule, bylaws and a copy of each application and procedure. With these policies in place, Battle Creek can be reassured that new board and committee members are positioned to be successful in their new role and make immediate positive impact toward achieving community goals.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community sets expectations for board and commission positions.	✓
		The community provides orientation packets to all appointed and elected members of development-related boards and commissions.	✓

Best practice findings

Best Practice 4.2—Education and training

Best Practice 4.2 assesses how a community encourages training and tracks training needs for appointed and elected officials, board members and staff. Trainings provide officials and staff with an opportunity to expand their knowledge and ultimately make more informed decisions about land use and redevelopment issues.

In Battle Creek, training needs are reviewed as part of the annual budget process and training is covered under a dedicated line item in the budget. The city uses a simple spreadsheet to log individual training needs and attendance. Newly elected and appointed officials are provided with training announcements via email and at meetings, and board members are provided an orientation refresher every 2–3 years. The city commission and planning commission meet annually to discuss the capital

improvements plan and related development issues; sharing information between elected and appointed officials and staff is key to fostering communication and effectively addressing development issues. The planning department prepares an annual report for the city commission, and training materials and related information is discussed at the end of each meeting agenda and emailed directly to board members from staff. Continuing these practices of budgeting for training, tracking training, notifying staff and officials about training opportunities and sharing information between elected and appointed officials and staff are essential to the efficient functioning of Battle Creek’s development processes now and in the future.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has a dedicated source of funding for training.	✓
		The community identifies training needs and tracks attendance for the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	✓
		The community encourages the governing body, boards, commissions and staff to attend trainings.	✓
		The community shares information between the governing body, boards, commissions and staff.	✓

Best Practice 5.1—Redevelopment Ready Sites®

Best Practice 5.1 assesses how a community identifies, visions and markets their priority redevelopment sites.

Battle Creek Unlimited (BCU) and City of Battle Creek have each identified priority redevelopment sites. Basic information for numerous priority sites can be found on the “available sites and buildings” feature on the BCU website, a comprehensive, searchable, easy-to-use map and list of available sites and buildings in the Battle Creek area. Basic information, development outcomes and criteria, community champions and visions have been gathered for the priority redevelopment sites identified

by the city and BCU. Available development tools and financial incentives have been identified for the priority sites as well. The downtown and industrial sites are packaged for easy viewing on their respective websites.

Continued collaboration with the local real estate community, downtown Battle Creek, City of Battle Creek, Battle Creek Unlimited, and other partner organizations for promotion of properties will provide maximum exposure of priority Battle Creek sites both statewide and nationally.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community identifies and prioritizes redevelopment sites.	✓
		The community gathers preliminary development information for prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓
		The community has developed a vision for the priority redevelopment site(s).	✓
		The community identifies available resources and incentives for prioritized redevelopment sites.	✓
		A “Property Information Package” for the prioritized redevelopment site(s) is assembled.	✓
		Prioritized redevelopment sites are actively marketed.	✓

Best practice findings

Best Practice 6.1—Economic development strategy

Best Practice 6.1 evaluates what goals and actions a community has identified to assist in strengthening its overall economic health. Today, economic development means more than business attraction and retention. Economic development is the process of building strong, adaptive communities and is critical to attract jobs, talent and new investment. Strategic economic development planning is critical to attract jobs and new investment in communities.

Battle Creek’s economic development strategy is woven into the new master plan, but was developed previously through an intense public engagement effort to discuss how to spark transformation in Battle Creek and improve the economic conditions of the community.

Development of the shared vision was convened through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Kellogg Company and included community meetings, engagement with various organizations, and extensive door-to-door conversations. The goals of BC Vision are focused on increasing jobs, talent and the culture of vitality in Battle Creek. The plan includes a timeline and responsible party’s document that provides implementation guidance to the many parties that are participating, particularly city staff and officials. Progress on the economic development strategy effort should be reported annually to the governing body, both progress on the strategy generally and the individual efforts of the city. This could be done as part of the master plan review.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The governing body has approved an economic development strategy.	✓
		The governing body annually reviews the economic development strategy.	✓

Best Practice 6.2—Marketing and promotion

Best Practice 6.2 evaluates how the community promotes and markets itself. Community marketing and promotion can take many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that rekindles community pride and improves consumer and investor confidence. Battle Creek’s marketing strategy identifies: core community strengths; needs; challenges; messages; target audiences; and partnerships. Through interviews with stakeholders, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted, providing context and information on community perceptions. Many entities market the Battle Creek community, including Battle Creek Unlimited, the Downtown Development Authority, City of Battle Creek Parks and Recreation, Cereal City Development Corporation/Kellogg Arena, Battle Creek Community Foundation, Calhoun County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Battle Creek. Battle Creek’s marketing strategy provides an understanding of the role that each entity plays in marketing to their respective audience, the core key messages of each, and the communication channels

used by each. This helps build understanding among the entities towards better and effective communication and marketing of the Battle Creek area, and also serves as a foundation for implementation of the master plan.

Coordination of these efforts will positively market the Battle Creek community to state, national and international investors who are seeking a vibrant, action-oriented and coordinated community in which to invest.

Key to effective and positive marketing efforts is a user-friendly website. Battle Creek’s website is comprehensive, user-friendly, and provides all needed information in a succinct, user-friendly and visually appealing way. Most planning, zoning and development information can be found on the community services webpages, including the newly adopted master plan, zoning ordinance, and relevant forms and applications. Board and commission applications can be found on the boards, committees and councils webpage, and the capital improvements plan can be found city clerk’s webpage, and the capital improvements plan can be found on the finance department webpage.

Initial RRC evaluation Sept 2015	Final RRC evaluation March 2018	Evaluation criteria	Recommended actions for certification
		The community has developed a marketing strategy.	✓
		The community has an updated, user-friendly municipal website.	✓

Conclusion

Battle Creek has exhibited a strong commitment to improving their redevelopment readiness and has worked diligently to meet the best practice criteria and achieve the Redevelopment Ready Certified Community® designation. The city has found a balance between removing unnecessary delays and hurdles, while preserving the integrity of the community's vision and goals, positioning the city for success. Battle Creek has set an example for the region as a leader in community revitalization. Certified communities signal a proactive, business friendly environment to developers and investors. RRC certification lasts for three years, if all best practice criteria

are maintained and the city will be required to submit biannual progress reports to the RRC team.

In today's competitive economy, developers and businesses can invest anywhere. Certified Redevelopment Ready Communities® signal that locating a new business or growing an existing one within their municipality is straightforward. Battle Creek has removed barriers to development by streamlining the review process and improving customer service, to ensure they city remains a competitive and attractive community for business and talent attraction.



MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) is the state's marketing arm and lead advocate for business development, talent and jobs, tourism, arts and cultural grants, and overall economic growth. The MEDC offers a number of business assistance services and capital programs for business attraction and acceleration, entrepreneurship, strategic partnerships, talent enhancement, and urban and community development.